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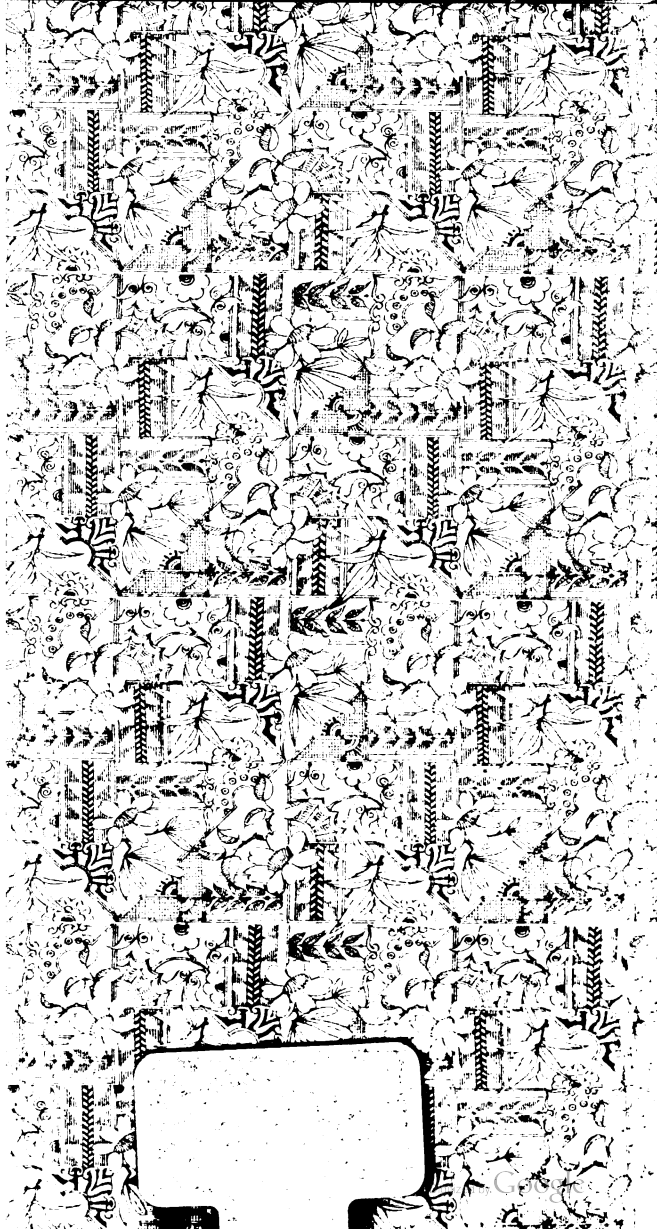


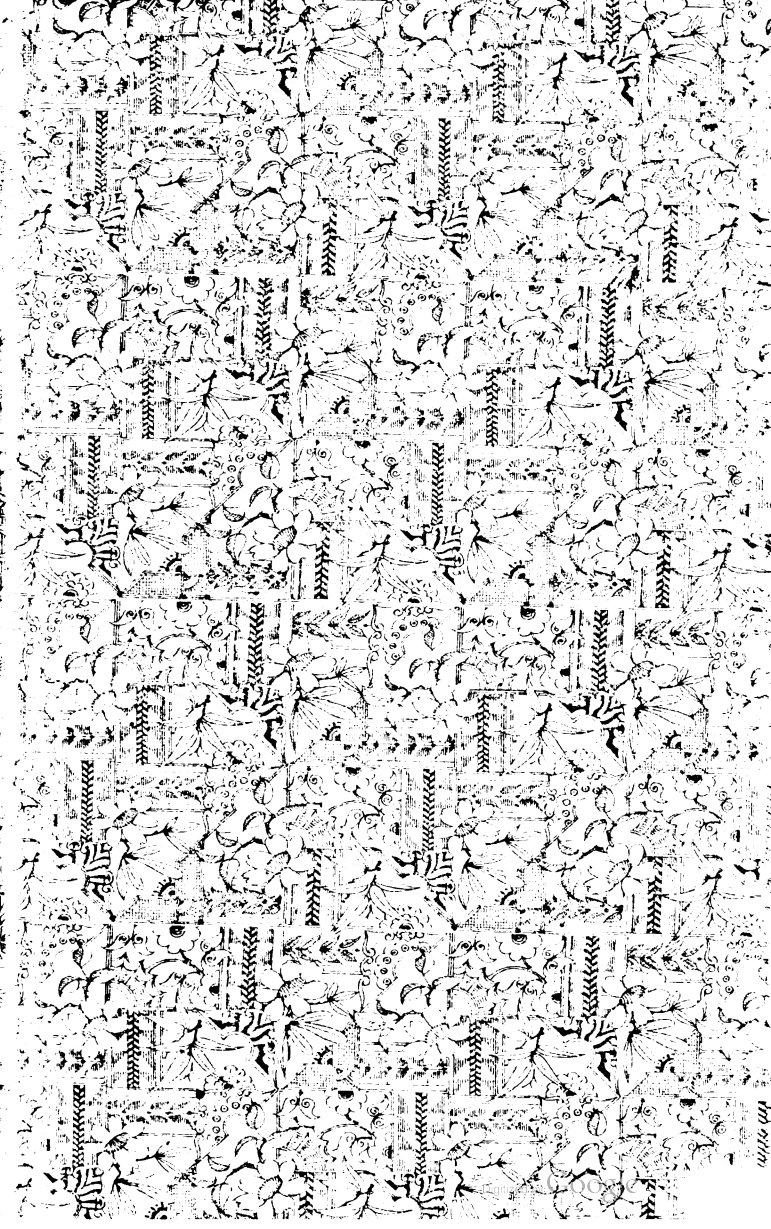
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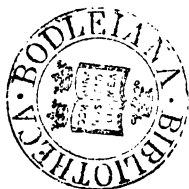
HENRY IRVING

ACTOR AND MANAGER

A Criticism of a Critic's Criticism.

BY

AN IRVINGITE.




LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

NEW YORK: 9 LAFAYETTE PLACE

1883

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LONDON :
BRADBURY AGNEW, & CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS

PRELUDE OF MOTTOES.

. . . . non ego paucis
Offendar maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura.

HORACE, *ARS POETICA*, *lines 351—353.*

. . . . over that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes.

WINTER'S TALE, *Act IV., Sc. 4, lines 90—92.*

So excellent in art, and still so rising,
That Christendom shall ever speak his virtue.

HENRY VIII., *Act IV., Sc. 2, lines 62, 63.*

. . . . now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature.

ROMEO AND JULIET, *Act II., Sc. 4, line 94.*

As for such as have neither the grace, nor the good gift, to
do well themselves, nor the common honesty to speak well of
others, I must (as I may) hear and bear their baitings with
patience.

R. WILMOT (1591).

PREFACE.



PREFACES, like petticoats, should be short ; many people think the shorter the better, at least with regard to the former ; for long petticoats do not more encumber their wearer, than long prefaces do the book to which they are attached : moreover, the public, especially those who are in a hurry, are wont to find both very much in their way.

In introducing the little stranger, for whose appearance I am responsible, but few words are necessary. It is written in answer to the "Critical Study" lately put forth by Mr. William Archer ; but I hope that it will interest all those who care for dramatic art, whether they have read Mr. Archer's work or not.

I must own that I am a friend of Mr. Irving : I have been so for some fifteen years, and I hope to be so for many more years. I do not

believe that a friend of an artist need be any the worse critic, because he is a friend ; and I am old-fashioned enough to think that friendship has few duties more pleasant or more urgent than that of fighting one's friend's battles. I have not the pleasure of Mr. Archer's acquaintance ; I do not know him even by sight ; I bear him no grudge :—

“ No levelled malice
Infects one comma in the course I hold.”

In my endeavour to refute his arguments, or to rebut his criticism where adverse to my friend, I trust I have used no unfair license, nor have been guilty of any rude personality. I have simply tried my best to justify the opinions that I, in common with many others, hold as to the merits of Mr. Irving as an artist, and to vindicate his claim to occupy that high position which he has reached, as I believe, by his own merits. To one who really loves the art which he professes and practises, success, with all the rich rewards that it brings, is less valued than the honour of that art to which he is devoted. To such a one the golden proofs of his audiences' favour are less dear than the consciousness that,

in all he does, he is faithful and loyal to the beloved mistress whom he serves. If a true artist be told to count the gains that he has made by the exercise of his profession, and not to mind how much adverse critics may question his merits, the answer to such advice is very obvious. "If I am not entitled," he will say, "to the substantial rewards lavished on me by the public, on any better grounds than the caprice of that public may furnish, I do not care for them ; what I desire is the right to feel that I have earned them, not only by my perseverance and industry, but by my faithfulness to the true principles of my art." It is in this spirit, I am sure, that Mr. Irving would meet such criticism as that of Mr. Archer ; and it is that spirit which has actuated me in writing the following pages.

If I have not put my name on the title-page of this pamphlet, it is from no desire to escape the responsibility of the opinions contained therein. It is only because I do not wish to obtrude my own personality, but rather to assume, I hope without presumption, the character of a representative of those who hold Mr. Irving to be indeed a great artist. If it should

be urged that Mr. Archer's pamphlet is merely the expression of an individual opinion, and therefore is not worthy such serious notice as I have taken of it, I would answer that, although he writes as an individual, he embodies the opinions and arguments of those who hold that Mr. Irving's success is due less to his merits as an artist than to the favour of fortune. I think it is time that those who hold such opinions should be fairly encountered; and that their arguments should be met with the care and elaboration which are scarcely possible within the limits of an ordinary magazine article. If there be any ridicule attaching to the principles of that artistic sect of which I profess myself a member, I am perfectly ready to face it. To my mind such ridicule is utterly without foundation; and it is with no feeling of hesitation, much less of shame, that I sign myself

AN IRVINGITE.

NOTE.—In all cases where Mr. Archer's actual words are quoted, the reference is given to the page of his work in which those words occur.

HENRY IRVING.

By AN IRVINGITE.

I.

IN venturing to attempt a reply to the critical study of Mr. William Archer, one who believes in, and admires Mr. Irving, has at once a difficult and an easy task : difficult, because, to answer such an inspired critic, even where with unwilling severity he wields the lash, must be difficult ; easy, because, by his own confession, Mr. Archer, if not quite converted from the errors of Anti-Irvingism, is so far advanced on the road to repentance, that we Irvingites may soon hope to number him amongst ourselves.

Indeed, nothing is more conspicuous in Mr. Archer's remarkable achievement, than the courteous reluctance with which he sees one of his arrows pierce the flesh of his much-loved victim ; of that noble animal whom, but a little time ago, he would have hunted even unto death ; but whom now he seeks to preserve, in the precincts of his own "rational appreciation," some-

times to chastise, often to admire, but always to protect and cherish as a source of intellectual pleasure and—indirectly—of pecuniary profit.

Mr. Henry Irving is going to America—he has arrived at the end of the third act of his dramatic career. Act I. Probation. Act II. Success as Actor. Act III. Success as Actor and Manager. Now comes a wait before the next Act, when the scene changes from London to New York, from England to America. Mr. Archer has watched Henry Irving through the past three stages of his career, with all the stern severity of a tutor, with all the loving anxiety of a fond but wise father. Where would Mr. Irving be now but for the solicitude of this guardian of his artistic education who, cruel only to be kind, flogged him when he was toiling on the road to success—merely to quicken his pace—and now that he has reached the goal, pats him so kindly on the back? True, as he pats him, he takes the opportunity to rub a little vinegar into the old wounds, not yet quite healed; but this is all for Mr. Irving's good, and no one knows it better than the actor himself and his admirers.

But this wait between the third and fourth acts of Mr. Irving's career, how can it better be filled, with greater profit to Mr. Irving and his guardian-Archer, than by the publication of a shilling volume of dis-

passionate criticism, in which the Author may throw dainty sops to the admirers of the popular actor and manager with one hand, while, with the other, he slips still daintier morsels into the mouths of his ravening detractors? Yes, even a rabid Irvingite must own Mr. Archer's *Venom*—I beg pardon, *Vellum-Parchment* pamphlet—is well timed; and that it is well written, the Author's name is sufficient guarantee—to those who know him.

When first sitting down to devour the tasty morsel, I forgot to ask who was the cook; but, on finding how deftly it was flavoured, I turned to the title-page for information. Shall I—dare I?—confess I knew not who William Archer was! It could not be the celebrated jockey, because his name is—by Jove, I forget even that—oh, Frederick, to be sure—the same as that of his melodious minstrel. No—it must be some one else; not Tom Archer, certainly, him I know full well: surely not the gentleman who nightly, in the person of Fouinard, bore with such patience the blows of the ruffianly Dubosc? Could it be that the worm had turned at last, and had thus sought to revenge the mimic injuries so often suffered at his manager's hands? No: the idea was preposterous. Of course I ought to have known who this great critic was, but I am only an ignorant Irvingite; so I sought

enlightenment. I found it ; but I can scarcely believe the knowledge I have gained is true. Let me put it interrogatively. Is William Archer the author of those powerful articles, published anonymously in the London *Figaro*, which, under cover of praising a foreign artist, heaped upon Henry Irving the most unqualified abuse? I tremble as I think of them ; they were so chastely severe. Something I heard afterwards about the proprietor of the paper having expressed regret ; some persons did not scruple to call those articles by such harsh terms as vile, and scurrilous ; but they must have been prejudiced : for myself, they crushed me—for the moment ; I wondered how Mr. Irving could survive them. Can it be this William Archer, who now lays his crown of mingled thorns and laurels at the feet of the actor whose “thoughtfulness, ingenuity, and earnestness,” whose “magnetic personality” he has come at last to recognise, even though they “shone through this unhappy veil of mannerism?” Can this William Archer, who now owns so gracefully that “Mr. Irving “has merits numerous and genuine enough to justify “the warmest admiration,” be the same great critic who, in conjunction with two other anonymous gentlemen, startled the world, in 1877, with that most elegant and witty *brochure*, called “The Fashionable

Tragedian ; " in which Mr. Irving was caricatured with the crude coarseness of one of those boyish artists who attempt frescoes on our street walls, and abused in terms which would have done honour to any female graduate at Billingsgate ? If he is indeed the same man, what a triumph may we Irving-worshippers not claim if such a scoffer at the god of our idolatry has come forward voluntarily, and from—well—" not wholly disinterested motives," to sing his ode—a little out of tune perhaps—in praise of the once object of his loathing and scorn ? Well may Mr. Irving smile, from the pinnacle of popularity, one of his most sardonic smiles, as he watches the conscientious, if awkward, genuflexions of this new admirer.

II.

LET us see what Mr. Archer has to say for and against Mr. Irving, first as actor, then as manager.

It was a methodic and, at the same time, pious plan of Robinson Crusoe, to open a ledger with Providence, setting down on one side the blessings for which he had to be thankful, and on the other, the misfortunes which he had to face. Were I to pursue that plan, we Irvingites should find we had much to

be thankful for in this, Mr. Archer's later declaration of faith. He is after all a species of judicial Balaam; he often sets out to condemn, and, spite of himself, is forced to approve; he sums up as if for a conviction, while the notes of evidence he produces are all in favour of an acquittal.

Mr. Archer's first chapter, little as it is, calls for less remark. Mr. Irving certainly takes his own company, &c. (not his orchestra), with him; he does not take his own audiences; and it remains to be seen whether he will exercise the same powerful charm over those in America, that he does over those at the Lyceum.

In the next chapter we are treated to a very learned disquisition on the difficulties which beset criticism on acting. There is, perhaps, nothing startlingly novel in this passage. "And is not this the very tragedy of acting—that its greatest triumphs, as well as its merest failures, fade even as they come into being, and leave not a wrack behind?" (pp. 16, 17). We certainly cannot see the actors of the past, unless spiritualists would oblige us with a view of some of them; all we can learn about them, as Mr. Archer says, is "the effect they produced upon their audiences." But actors may console themselves with the fact that—however distasteful it may be to the cultured and dispassionate minds of some critics, whose own work

does not command much attention—success in their art obtains for them, in their lifetime, more immediate, and more visible recognition, than success in any of the sister arts. The triumphs of a great actor may be short-lived, but they are splendid while they last; no one but a great orator—and he, too, must be a born actor if he is really to be popular—tastes so much of the sweets of popularity as he does. Nor can actors complain that when they are dead, their names are forgotten; they live in history, side by side with those who gave to their fellow creatures some of the purer and nobler pleasures of life with the pen, the pencil, or the sculptor's chisel.

As to the difficulty of forming any standard of art in acting, we have, in our own time, at least, one advantage; we have more artists from whose performances we can judge as to what is good or bad, and these artists not confined to our own country. French, German, Italian, American actors and actresses appear before us, some with great, some with moderate reputations; and we are able to see by what means they produce their effects upon the audiences in their own country. Human nature is, in some broad respects, much the same all the world over; but the temperaments of nations differ essentially in minor details of taste, of emotion, even of passion; still, making

allowance for this, we cannot but gain great advantage from the increased facility we have nowadays of seeing the acting of foreign artists; we compare them with our own, and judge in what points their method is better or worse than ours. But, in doing this, we must be careful not to exaggerate the merits of a foreign actor simply because we want to depreciate those of one of our own country; nor must we go into paroxysms of enthusiasm over the gestures and expression of some artist, simply because we do not understand a word of the language which he is speaking, and choose to assume that what he does is appropriate to what he says.

We must accept the conditions, such as they are, under which alone we can criticise acting: our experience may be "comparatively narrow," as Mr. Archer says; but it is wide enough for the purpose, if we choose to acquire it. We cannot compare the works of past actors with those of the present, in the same way that we can compare the works of the old masters in painting, in sculpture, and in music, with those of our own day. But the dramatic literature of the past is with us still; by carefully studying that, by analysing the motives, and endeavouring to enter into the thoughts of the characters in the best plays which have come down to

us, we can acquire a habit of mind, which will enable us to judge, less superficially, the merits of the various actors whose impersonations we may have to criticise. Human nature is always with us, it is around us on every side ; by close observation of that, by mixing in various scenes of life, and among various conditions of men, we may gain, through experience, an insight into the anatomy of the passions, just as we may gain a knowledge of the anatomy of the body by studying in the hospitals.

Unless a man has gone through some such mental training as I have indicated, he cannot be a good critic of acting. As Mr. Archer justly says, "there is " a strong tendency in dealing with acting to trans-
" late ' This pleases me,' into ' This is good ; ' ' That
" displeases me,' into ' That is bad : ' " he himself has furnished in his past criticism on Mr. Irving, and does still furnish in his present work, in a less degree, a very remarkable instance of such a tendency. Certain it is, that criticism of acting has always been, and will always be, like criticism of most other arts, very trying to the artists themselves. Painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, must inevitably encounter the irrational censure, and the undiscerning praise of self-established critics, who know little or nothing about what they criticise. Perhaps acting, from the

very nature of the conditions under which the art must be practised, is peculiarly exposed to such criticism. Everybody considers himself, or herself, a judge of acting; a judge against whose fiat there should be no appeal. They resent the very existence of a superior court, in the shape of the public. I believe, myself, that if anyone were to light upon an undiscovered island in mid-ocean, with only one inhabitant; and that unique native, after being decently clothed, were taken by his discoverer to a theatre, he would be prepared to furnish—in his own language—a criticism of the play and the actors therein; which, if one could understand it, would be quite as edifying as some of the criticisms, coming from persons of more experience, that one reads or hears.

III.

MR. ARCHER'S next chapter is a very diminutive one: in it he describes the scope and object of his criticism:—"I do not," he says, "hold a brief for either "the prosecution or the defence; rather, I would "attempt to report concisely the pleadings on both "sides, so that the emphatic award of the jury—the "great public which flocks nightly to the Lyceum—

“ may be explained, if not justified, to those whose opinion tends in the opposite direction ” (pp. 26—27). In fact, his position is that of a judge; how far he fulfils this promise of impartiality, and whether his summing up does not, now and then, lapse into a supplementary speech for the prosecution, we shall see as we progress in our examination of his criticism.

Mr. Archer commences by admitting that “ the Lyceum is as prominent an element in the social life of London as the Théâtre Français in that of Paris ” (p. 28); that “ it is more than fashionable, it is popular ” (p. 29); that it is “ a recognised institution in London life ” (p. 31); that “ such a brilliant success, achieved and maintained by one man, is probably without precedent in the history of the stage ” (p. 31); and, he asks, “ should we not conclude that this actor, whom an enlightened nation delights to honour as never actor was honoured before, must be one of the most incontestably great artists of all time ? ” (p. 32).

Having made these handsome concessions,—if to admit a fact can be called a concession,—which tell so much in favour of Mr. Irving’s claim to be a great actor, Mr. Archer proceeds to qualify these in such a manner as to make them tell, if possible, against

him. "There has probably never been an actor of
" equal prominence whose talent, nay, whose mere
" competence, has been so much contested. He is
" the idol of a select circle of devotees, but even
" it is small, and its fervour is apt to be tempered
" with apology. The great public regards him with
" interest and respect rather than with enthusiasm;
" or if with enthusiasm, then it is for his success
" rather than his talent since with the British public
" success is ever the strongest title to admiration"
(p. 32).

Mark how thoroughly judicial is the spirit of these remarks. This actor, who has raised his theatre into the position of an "institution" (p. 29); a position such as no other theatre under any previous actor-manager ever occupied, who has succeeded with the aid only of "one artist whose attraction is at all comparable
" to his," in bringing "not merely a playgoing class,"
"but the whole of modern London," to the Lyceum,
"and the attraction is not fitful or temporary but
"constant" (p. 31); the actor who, by Mr. Archer's own showing, has done all this, is told by this calm dispassionate judge, that, when he gazes, night after night, on the crowded mass of human faces, whose eyes follow his every movement; when he finds, night after night, that hush of intense silence, which,

indicating as it does the most concentrated attention, is the sweetest sound to the dramatist's or actor's ear; when at the end of the scene, or at some other point which cannot interfere with the action of the play, he hears the spontaneous thunders of applause break forth; with a nightly experience such as this, not only in London, but in every town, great or small, in which he appears, Mr. Irving is told that he must not be misled by appearances. "No," says Judge Archer, "do not deceive yourself; these people are not enthusiastic, they are only respectful and interested in you; or if you *will* call it enthusiasm, it is only your success, not you, that they admire; they are trying to express their perfect delight at being brought, night after night, to see and applaud an actor who they are not sure can even act at all." And here let us suppose Judge Archer favours the counsel for the prosecution with a wink, as much as to say, "Rather a good point that? You did not think of that!"

But, continuing in the same facetious vein, Judge Archer says, "Towards some great actors men have felt the warmest personal gratitude, as though towards benefactors whom they had to thank for the profoundest emotions of their lives. These it would have required some courage to criticise, since, in

"some of their parts at least, general consent pronounced them ideally great. Towards Mr. Irving there is no such feeling among the thousands who flock to his theatre" (p. 33).

Oh! wise young judge! If I had been at a loss for words to express the relation between Mr. Irving and the majority of his audience, I could not have found any more appropriate than these you have so kindly provided for me. The many persons, utter strangers, in all ranks and conditions of life, who write to Mr. Irving and tell him what delight his acting has afforded them, do express "the warmest personal gratitude, as though towards a benefactor whom they have to thank for the profoundest emotion of their lives." I thank thee, judge, for teaching me those words.

"In no single part has general consent pronounced him ideal; in many it has emphatically pronounced him quite the reverse, though the Lyceum was none the less crowded on that account" (p. 33).

It is most presumptuous to dispute with one, to whom the innermost thoughts of the minds of thousands are as open, and easy to read, as a page of the largest print. Else, I would ask Mr. Archer, if he would kindly tell me who is the ideal Hamlet of some of these thousands, if Mr. Irving is not? Who has

been pronounced by critics and private individuals, over and over again, the ideal Iago? Who was it first rescued Shakespeare's "Richard III." from the vulgar clutches of Colley Cibber, and gave to us Shakespeare's masterpiece of intellectual villainy, of right royal hypocrisy, as the great poet conceived and drew him, but Mr. Irving? Who is it that makes the Charles I. of the loyal cavaliers, the brave gentleman, as drawn by the truthful pen of Sir Thomas Herbert, live before us, if Mr. Irving does not? Did you forget, Mr. Archer, that you yourself have spoken of this portrait as "noble and beautiful" (p. 69)? If Mr. Irving is not the ideal of Charles I., then no actor ever was the ideal of anything.

Judge Archer next proceeds to give what he is pleased to call "a pretty fair statement of the attitude of mind of, say, four-fifths of an average Lyceum audience" (p. 34). According to this most wise judge, that attitude is one which leads them "to dilate upon the splendour of the scenery, to admire Miss Ellen Terry, and to be reticent about Mr. Irving" (p. 34); and if pressed upon the latter subject, to say that, if Mr. Irving were not Mr. Irving, he would be a great actor. Then Mr. Archer, who is evidently the confidential confessor of the Lyceum audiences, gives us the result of his own "repeated personal observations."

This is that although "on a first night enthusiasm is the order of the evening; but it is otherwise after a piece has run a week or so." The crowded audiences at the Lyceum as a rule applaud but feebly, and *the attendants in front of the house are not above contributing to the rapturous ovations.*" (p. 34.)

It must be owned the last is a pretty sentence; "rapturous ovations," of course, is "writ sarkastic," as he has just told us the applause was feeble. Now, Mr. Archer, in your character of witness I am going to contradict you most flatly; I will give you the result of my own repeated personal observation in this matter. Every one, who knows anything about theatres, knows that a first-night audience is always the most enthusiastic; if for no other reason, because the fashionable parts of the theatre are then occupied by persons who do not think it is a crime to express their feelings, and are not ashamed of applauding when they are pleased. But, allowing for this, I maintain that the audiences at the Lyceum are, on other nights, quite as attentive and quite as enthusiastic, as on a first night. In the pit, upper boxes, and gallery, the applause is hearty and sincere; but what is most important is the close and fixed attention they give to the play; every word is followed with intelligent care; no movement or gesture escapes the eye; but they never applaud at incon-

venient points, so as to interrupt the dialogue or action, nor do they allow others to do so. Of course, some nights the audience are more demonstrative than others; but the impression that Mr. Archer, as a witness, seeks to create in the minds of his readers, namely, that the applause is feeble, and comes mainly from the attendants in front of the house, is decidedly a false impression. There is no rule against the attendants applauding if they like; but Mr. Archer implies that they are made to do so, in order to supply the enthusiasm lacking in the audience. This is a very paltry insinuation.

Mr. Archer's power of seeing what passes in the minds of these large audiences is little short of miraculous; to be able to throw a cold and piercing glance along the hundreds of faces present, and to read their inmost thoughts, is a most uncanny accomplishment. If the profession of critic does not answer, Mr. Archer has before him a splendid career as a professor of electro-biology and second sight.

Having disposed of four-fifths of the audience, on whose apparent enthusiasm he throws the cold and disillusionising light of his critical insight, Mr. Archer divides the remaining fifth among the "ebullient devotees," and the "frigid sceptics" (p. 35). The latter are "a minority, small but not unimportant, who

“can see nothing but faults in Mr. Irving” (p. 35). “This attitude of mind is especially common among those who have not seen Mr. Irving often enough to become accustomed to him” (p. 36). This is another way of putting the truism, that prejudice and ignorance go hand in hand together. That charming feminine formula, “I don’t know him, but I hate him,” is one of the chief principles of the class of minds to which Mr. Archer alludes. Would that all these fanatical Anti-Irvingites were as open to conviction as he is! He owns that “familiarity with Mr. Irving’s art, so far from lessening respect, may almost be called a necessary condition of the merest tolerance. If heretics can only be attracted often enough to the temple, they are almost sure to become—more or less—converted” (p. 36).

I do not know if Mr. Archer could have paid Mr. Irving a higher compliment. It proves how little superficial his art is; for there are many artists, familiarity with whose work diminishes one’s respect and admiration in a painful degree. To appreciate all good work, whether in poetry, in painting, in sculpture, in music, or in acting, thorough, and not superficial acquaintance with it is absolutely necessary. How many pictures, how many poems charm you the first time you see or read them! you return to them,

expecting to renew your enjoyment; alas! the charm has gone. Mr. Archer's own little work is a case in point; when first I read it from beginning to end, I thought it a very pretty performance. True, it seemed a little vague and contradictory. It reminded me of a violin-player playing on an instrument with one string frightfully out of tune. On reading it a second time, I began to ask myself if, after all, it was a great critical work; and on a third perusal, I had serious doubts whether this critic, who was writing about acting, really knew anything at all about his subject. It is very painful to have to confess this; but it is best to tell the truth, even though it may lower me in the eyes of Mr. Archer.

The following passage sets before us a problem which Mr. Archer seems unable to answer with satisfaction to himself. "And this, I repeat, is the great anomaly of Mr. Irving's position—that an actor whose powers have been and are attacked so sweepingly and defended with such qualifications, should have climbed to the high top-gallant of success, and fixed himself there so much more securely than any of his predecessors" (p. 37). Now this is one of those anomalies which may be easily explained, if one does not shut one's eyes to the obvious explanation. Rack your judicial mind

no more, most wise judge: Mr. Irving could never have climbed to that "high top-gallant"—in spite of his legs—if he had not possessed the very quality you would deny in him—genius. Had he been only the charlatan that, in the more acidulated passages of your criticism, when a gigantic heartburn seems to rise and impede the sweetness of your utterances, you would seem to insinuate Mr. Irving is, he might have been pushed to the top of the mast; but, believe me, he never would have had that security of tenure you admit him to possess: and your admission is all the more valuable, considering the frantic efforts you have made to pull him down.

Mr. Archer's explanation of the anomaly is that "Mr. Irving's worshippers are active, his detractors "more or less passive" (pp. 37, 38). It may be so; but Mr. Archer must confess, when he was among the detractors, he did his best to remove any imputation of inactivity that might rest upon the sect: nobody could accuse him of being passive.

We now come to one of the most touching passages in Mr. Archer's book; it is an excerpt from his autobiography, and short as it is, it makes us long for more. It is the account, told in graceful and modest language, of his conversion; including a glimpse of the brief quasi-martyrdom through which he passed

before he could emancipate himself from the chains of error.

Even now the poison of Anti-Irvingism is in his veins, and occasionally infects, as we have seen, his clear and impartial mind. But let us not be too hard on him; he has repented him of his folly, he has confessed his offence; if the confession is, here and there, weakened by a hankering after the old errors, let us be patient: perfect conversion is the work of time.

Mr. Archer's "*Apologia*"—what memories does that word recall! perhaps some day Mr. Archer may give us a fuller autobiography fit to rank by the side of Cardinal Newman's great work—Mr. Archer's "*Apologia pro erroribus suis*" will be more properly considered, when I come to compare the present work with "The Fashionable Tragedian." For the present let us contemplate, not without deep compassion, the spectacle of Mr. Archer's sufferings as revealed by himself.

Most converts go through some mental perplexity and anguish, but Mr. Archer seems to have suffered more than usual. Listen to the few modest words in which, with all the sincerity but with none of the egotism of Bunyan, he narrates his progress from darkness into light.

“In this outer darkness”(of fanatical Anti-Irvingism)
“ I should probably have remained, but that by the
“ grace of circumstances it became my business to
“ see and study Mr. Irving whether I liked it or not,
“ and carefully to analyze my impressions. At first I
“ did not like it at all but little by little I found
“ my nerves adjust themselves to the inevitable”
(pp. 39, 40). It must have been a terrible moral discipline to the author of “The Fashionable Tragedian” to be compelled to study the performances of the actor, whom, without studying, he had so virulently abused. The words quoted, few as they are, present to the mind’s eye a striking picture of noble self-devotion. Only one incident of this same tragic period of his self-discipline does Mr. Archer narrate, but it is one of infinite pathos. “His Benedick is a very different
“ performance * * * * from the terrible Mac-
“ beth whose image haunts me to this day. I went
“ with a friend on the last night of the run, and I well
“ remember how he and I, as the curtain fell, ‘looked
“ ‘ at each other with a wild surmise, silent,’ and wondering whether we, or those of the audience who
“ applauded such a performance, were labouring under
“ a strange hallucination” (p. 41).

That awful look! I count it among the negative blessings of my life that I did not see it. I doubt if I

should have survived the shock. What a fitting end to the tragedy! Macbeth had expiated most of his crimes on the point of Macduff's sword;—I tremble when I think what the consequences might have been if Mr. Archer had played Macduff;—but, for one crime, the atonement yet remained to be made: for the agony inflicted on the sensitive soul of the great arch critic, the actor must suffer no mimic death; the barb of Mr. Archer's satire must pierce his flesh, and must not be withdrawn till it had rankled in the festering wound. Atrocious as the crime was—I mean the crime of Mr. Irving playing Macbeth before Mr. Archer—who will not allow that the punishment was adequate?

It is an open question whether, considering all Mr. Archer has suffered in the cause of Irvingism, we Irvingites ought not to canonize him. It is doubtful, however, whether the Anti-Irvingites might not claim him as one of *their* saints, which would be awkward; perhaps, on the whole, we had better wait and see if he has the courage to persevere in his repentance.

Mr. Irving is, so Mr. Archer tells us, “of all living Englishmen the best advertised at the smallest relative cost” (p. 42). Everybody, high and low, it appears, against their will, is engaged in advertising him. Even Mr. Archer, in writing his “Critical Study,” was perpe-

trating a "puff oblique or by implication" (p. 43), and, "from motives not wholly disinterested," he trusts "it may find unlimited currency." Thank Heaven! Mr. Irving's popularity does good to one deserving person, at least, besides himself. It will put, nay, it has already put, some money into Mr. Archer's pocket. On what more deserving object could the golden beams that radiate from his nimbus of popularity fall? "Even the scoffs and cavillings of the rabidest infidels"—*e.g.*, such playful projectiles as "The Fashionable Tragedian"—"merely serve the purpose of the puff collusive, which 'acts in the disguise of determined hostility'" (p. 43). Well, Mr. Archer, there is an engaging frankness about you which wins one's heart; tell us, at the end of the year, if you found the "puff oblique" more remunerative than the "puff collusive."

IV.

WE come now to the fifth chapter, in which Mr. Archer seems, after his disagreeable task of apology and confession, to breathe again, for in this he deals with Mr. Irving's physical qualities, on which subject, as we shall see, he is able to relapse occasionally into the pleasant freedom of his old unregenerate style.

One point on which, under various forms of wording, Mr. Archer insists, is, that "the ability to walk and "to talk" is "an indispensable condition of tolerable "acting." This seems a very safe axiom; and yet Mr. Archer goes almost out of his way to refute it. For, according to him—absolutely, when he was unconverted, relatively, since his conversion—Mr. Irving can neither walk nor talk; and yet Mr. Archer graciously admits he is more than a "tolerable actor;" for he cannot deny that thousands and thousands of human beings, many of them, at least, possessed of common sense, of taste, and of culture, have paid Henry Irving the tribute not only of toleration, but of praise; have not only borne with him, endured him, but have lifted him up to the highest pinnacle of fame that any contemporary actor could hope to enjoy; and what is more, they have, up to the present at least, kept him there. Even Mr. Archer, with that exquisitely tender conscience—on artistic matters—which forced him, in his "ebullient" youth, to burst forth into those eloquent and elegant denunciations of Mr. Irving as a grotesque monster of all that was vile in art; even he now comes forward to admit that familiarity with his subject has, so far from breeding contempt, transformed him from a ribald scoffer into a rational admirer. So

D

far so good : Mr. Irving cannot walk or talk, but he can act.

It would almost seem that Mr. Archer had, at one time, fallen into that error which has possessed so many of the Anti-Irvingites, namely, that acting chiefly consists in walking and talking. Now Mr. Archer has, willingly or unwillingly, refuted the error.

In what *does* acting, then, really consist ?

I would answer, in the power of projecting your own thoughts and feelings into another nature than your own ; in so closely identifying yourself, not physically, but mentally and morally, with some other human being, that not only in what you speak and do, but in what you think and feel, you are for the time that other human being, and not yourself. An actor may recite the speeches of his part in the most harmonious tones, and with perfect emphasis ; he may move with the grace of an Apollo, with the dignity of a Jove ; but unless, when neither speaking nor doing anything, his thoughts and actions are those of the character he represents, and not of himself, he will never be a great actor.

It is because Mr. Irving possesses this greatest quality of an actor in the highest degree ; because—with physical peculiarities which any child in the nursery might succeed in drawing, and with pecu-

liarities of manner which any man possessing the slightest trace of his monkey origin, in the shape of mimetic power, can imitate—he yet succeeds in transforming himself into so many different natures; in representing such different individualities as Matthias and Charles I., Louis XI. and Hamlet, Eugene Aram and Digby Grand, Iago and Lesurques, Benedick and Dubosc, not to mention many others, all with such distinct, minute, and consistent characteristics—it is because, in spite of the comparatively few natural and physical advantages which have been given him, by force of intellect, and by keen perceptive sympathy he succeeds in doing this, that he is the great actor which so many thousands acknowledge him to be.

But now we are on the subject of Mr. Irving's physical peculiarities, I would ask Mr. Archer—Is not all this about Mr. Irving's legs, and his walk, and his jerkiness, rather played out? Is it quite worthy of Mr. Archer's great critical talent? Why not leave such obvious points to be scored by the average Anti-Irvingite of society, when he holds forth, with an energy so unusual as to make one tremble lest his health should suffer from the effort, at some select dinner-party in Mayfair? It is a great privilege to hear the fashionable gentleman on the subject of the fashionable tragedian. If he does not quite rise to the literary and

artistic height which Mr. Archer and his coadjutors reached in their criticism of 1877, it must be allowed the subject inspires him with unwonted eloquence. "What, *he* act with legs like that!" Then if anyone ventures to contradict his fashionable mightiness, or to question his critical discernment, his language becomes only more forcible; and he does not console himself till he has looked in the glass for a minute or two, and assured himself that the bow of his white tie has not been crumpled by his eloquence; and that the high-bred placidity of his vacuously idiotic countenance has not been lashed into vulgar expressiveness by the storm of his indignation.

Every created thing has its final cause; and the final cause of Mr. Irving's legs must be to furnish his opponents with a subject for their satire. Never, surely, did wit rest on a more slender foundation; but at least it is strong enough to bear the superstructure placed on it. If we Irvingites ever raise a statue to our idol, the Anti-Irvingites should rightly pay for the lower half; for, without Mr. Irving's legs, they would have had little enough to go upon.

After his long dissertation on Mr. Irving's management of his limbs and voice, and of his mannerisms generally, Mr. Archer says:—"All this, I am aware, is "mere commonplace. Mr. Irving's mannerisms are

“ a proverb and a by-word, and there would be no
“ need to dwell on them were it not that some people
“ have become so accustomed to them as either to
“ forget their existence or proclaim them as virtues ”
(p. 69).

Now I am not aware that any Irvingite denies the existence of Mr. Irving's defects, much less proclaims them as virtues. What we do say, is this ; that we are sick of hearing the same angry denunciation of his defects, tediously reiterated, with more or less paltry attempts at wit and sarcasm, while his undoubtedly great merits are petulantly denied, or at the best grudgingly admitted. We allow he has faults, like all artists, many faults if you will ; but we say, that his merits far outweigh his faults. We are sorry he has not that grace of movement, and that melody of voice, which some of his fellow artists, and I dare say, many of his detractors have ; but, as he has not, we occupy our attention, when witnessing his performances, not in sneering at his limbs, but in admiring the art which triumphs over so many obstacles. To us, Mr. Irving's voice has often a singular pathos, his gestures all have a meaning ; we follow the workings of his mind in the careful and vivid presentation of the character he enacts : the man he represents stands before us, as he thought, as he felt ; if not as he spoke

and moved. We may not agree with every detail of his interpretation : we may think a point here and there is missed, or that such and such a passage might be differently rendered ; but in every word, and in every action, we trace the result of deep thought and earnest sympathy. We recognize that whatever part he may be playing, Henry Irving never says or does anything, but he has some well-considered reason for it ; we are sure that, in portraying human emotions, he does not pretend to feel, but really does feel ; that there are in his acting no moments of carelessness, or of indifference ; he is not saying to himself all the time, " what nonsense this all is ! " he is in earnest : and after all, though it may not be fashionable, being in earnest is the best way to impress the reality of what you are saying or doing on others. Intensity—for which Mr. Archer seems to have only a flatulent sneer—is a quality even more useful than graceful gesture, or faultless elocution ; nay, it is the very greatest quality an actor can possess. The intellect and the heart need not necessarily be dissociated ; and it is possible, when Mr. Archer thinks that the great majority of the audience at the Lyceum are " only intellectually interested," that they are also " emotionally excited." No doubt the presence of such a cool-headed, dispassionate critic, as Mr. Archer, acts as a

moral refrigerator on his fellow spectators : but if he perseveres in his admirable resolve to make himself more and more familiar with Mr. Irving's acting, he will light, I venture to say, on many occasions, both in London and the provinces, when Mr. Irving's audiences will leave no room, in his judicial mind, for any doubt of their enthusiasm.

V.

MR. ARCHER contends that Mr. Irving has not mastered the rudiments of acting ; taking for his text the actor's own words. " There are some, who lament " that there are now no schools for actors. This is a " very idle lamentation. Every actor in full employ- " ment gets plenty of schooling, for the best schooling is " practice, and there is no school so good as a well- " conducted play-house. The truth is, that the cardinal " secrets of success in acting are found within, while " practice is the surest way of fertilizing these germs " (p. 54). Mr. Archer takes two analogies, one, " a painter " turned loose in picture galleries, to copy all that " comes in his way, good, bad, and indifferent " (p. 55) ; the other, a violinist, who " is to be given an " instrument and told to find out as best he can how

“ to play on it ” (p. 56). But these analogies are scarcely exact. There is, of course, a mechanism belonging to the art of acting, which every actor must learn. But he learns that practically from the stage-manager, when he is serving his apprenticeship. No doubt some principles of acting can be learned from a private teacher. Mr. Boucicault, in his lecture, showed us many such principles, all purely mechanical. Elocution, as far as it consists in emphasis, and, to a certain degree, in intonation, can be taught ; but after all, the real practice of gesture and elocution can be only acquired by acting and speaking in public. In short, it comes to this, that the fixed principles of the art of acting are very few ; while those of painting and music are very many. A man unable to read, or ignorant of his own language, could not act ; any more than a cripple who cannot get, without assistance, from one side of the stage to another. But, granted that a man can read and speak, and that he has the use of his legs, so that he can walk across the stage ; then, I contend that—provided he is content to serve his apprenticeship in small parts, and has a sufficient variety of these to perform—he can learn his art better on the stage, and as a member of a dramatic company, than in any conservatoire. Of course, he must have other and much higher qualifications, if he

is to become an actor. I have already explained in what the art of acting mainly consists. Conservatoires may turn out a number of young men and women with elegant manners, faultless pronunciation, and well-rounded gesture; but the few great actors and actresses that they produce are those to whom nature has given the talent for acting; and their education as actors—distinguished from reciters—practically commences the first time that they face a public audience in company with their fellow actors.

All such points as repose, gesture, management of the voice and limbs, are more or less matters of taste: certainly there are definite faults of pronunciation, and, perhaps, of gesture; but for the expression of emotions and passion, for the tangible and visible presentment of what the mind conceives, or the heart feels, for these there are no fixed rules. I know that Mr. French will sell Mr. Archer, or myself, a little manual which professes to explain, in words, how every human passion should be expressed; but I do not think any amount of study bestowed on that manual, would enable either of us to express on the stage the commonest emotion—unless we had some natural talent for acting—so as to be understood and appreciated by our audience. The probable result would be that, when we intended to represent love, we

should be suspected of portraying the village idiot ; or, while wishing to convey that the burden of despair was too much for us, we should only be the object of languid compassion, as the victims of indigestion.

But in this portion of his critical study, Mr. Archer's grasp of his subject seems to me very loose. Does he really think, or believe, that the mechanism of acting consists in nothing more than in knowing how to sit down, how to move, how to walk, and how to speak? Does he not know that there *are* certain principles on which the art of stage management is based, far wider in their scope than the four he mentions? It may be stated, briefly, that the most important thing an actor has to learn is, to find his place in relation to the other characters on the stage, be they few or many. In fact, on this depends the effectiveness of all situations. Now this can only be learned in rehearsals on the stage. I do not know any excellence more remarkable, in Mr. Irving's acting, than the skill with which he graduates his movements as regards the other characters ; in short, the art with which he poses himself and groups his characters, whether in a picture of still life, or in a crowd full of movement, or in a strong dramatic situation.

“ Oh, but that,” says Mr. Archer, “ is all stage

management, and I admit Mr. Irving may 'fairly be called a great stage-manager'" (p. 97). But in the name of common sense, my dear Arch-Critic, how can an actor be a great stage-manager if he is himself ignorant of the first principles of his art? I have seen Mr. Irving at rehearsals, long before he had reached the eminent position which he now so justly holds, and I noticed with what minute care he arranged all the business, not only for himself, but for those who were acting with him. In fact, he had evidently thought out every character in the play, and knew exactly what they should do, and how they should do it. Since he has been his own manager, I have had the pleasure of being present at one or two important rehearsals; I saw that not only did he observe and direct every detail of "business" on the stage, but that he was equally alive to any error of pronunciation, especially to those on which well educated people, unhappily, bestow the sanction of their practice.

Mr. Archer admits that "in a certain character, or, on " a certain night, he (Mr. Irving) will be a very fountain " of English undefiled" (p. 67). I am glad to agree with him; only with this qualification, that I have been more fortunate than Mr. Archer, and have found this phenomenon in many characters and on many nights.

Mr. Irving's faults of speech and of movement both, I imagine, proceed from the same cause, namely, from a conscious deficiency of rude physical strength ; but it is a remarkable point that I never remember any occasion on which Mr. Irving had, as many emotional actors are wont to do, bawled himself hoarse ; and very few, in which he had so little regulated his physical exertions as to leave himself evidently exhausted in body before the end of the piece. The restlessness, of which Mr. Archer complains, is common to all highly nervous organisations. Close observation of human nature has taught me that the strongest passions, though often expressed in sluggish, cold natures by one grand and awful gesture, are, in nearly all highly sensitive natures, expressed by rapid, frequent, and what may be almost termed fidgetty movements. Mr. Irving is of a temperament highly nervous, but he suppresses the restlessness engendered by such a temperament with wonderful success. If Mr. Archer really believes Mr. Irving cannot stand still, let him go—without the glasses through which he saw the Fashionable Tragedian,—and watch Mr. Irving, as Shylock, in the Trial Scene. I could give many other examples, but this will suffice.

The essentially dual nature of Mr. Archer's mind, on the subject of Mr. Irving's art, leads him to enunciate

so many irreconcilable opinions; that it is difficult to follow him systematically through his Critical Study. Judge Archer is evidently making a strong effort, all through his summing up, to remember that he is not counsel for the prosecution; while, at the same time, he hankers after the latter character as one much better suited to his taste; the result is that, in the middle of what would pass for an eloquent denunciation of the defendant, he suddenly pulls up, and lets fall a sentence which shows that, when he chooses to give it fair play, his sense of justice is stronger than his prejudice.

At other times the "leaven of the Old Man," the taint of that dyspeptic spite which eructated "The Fashionable Tragedian," asserts itself at the very point where one is beginning to admire the critic's fairness and power of appreciation. Take the following passage: "Even now, when he is at rest, his poses "are often full of elegance. But he never will be at "rest" (p. 61). It is a little difficult to understand how an actor can be said to be often graceful when at rest, while one is told in the next sentence, that "*he never is at rest.*" To make his point clearer, Mr. Archer says, a few lines lower down, that "this fault" (restlessness) "arises from a positive inability to be still" (p. 61). I give it up: I remember no form of logical

syllogism which can help us here. A parallel one might find. Mr. Archer is just when he casts aside prejudice ; but he never casts aside prejudice ; therefore Mr. Archer is never just.

But let us see how our Arch-Critic applies his general principles in some particular cases. Of Lesurques Mr. Archer says : " Mr. Irving makes him " nervously restless from his very first entrance. His " mere manner of eating soup suggests a conscience " burdened with some ghastly crime, contemplated " or committed. Not otherwise must Orestes have " lunched, with the Furies for waitresses " (p. 62).

The latter sentence contains a very pretty illustration, but scarcely apposite ; for, under these circumstances, Orestes would probably not have lunched at all : but Mr. Irving's manner, in the scene alluded to, is not suggestive of any such conscious criminality ; all that it suggests is, that Lesurques is anxious and nervous about what he is going to undertake, namely, the presentation to his father of a large sum of money, that may enable him to give up his inn, and return to his family. It is an experiment he is about to try, on which a great deal of his own and his daughter's happiness depends ; and it is very natural his manner should betray his anxiety about the result.

Mr. Archer also complains that this "positive inability to be still" was "the great flaw in his admirable Iago" (pp. 61, 62); but, except on the first night, when Mr. Irving was unusually nervous, I cannot admit there was any want of repose in that almost perfect impersonation. The same fault was "one of the many blemishes of his Romeo" (p. 62),—in which, by the way, Mr. Archer, unlike most of the Anti-Irvingites, is just enough to admit "there were one or two striking beauties" (p. 62): he says, with great truth and discernment, in a former passage, that Romeo, though "clothed in a splendid robe of poetry," is "radically common-place," and that is the "one thing Mr. Irving can never be" (p. 48).

I wonder, having had the courage to take this, the true view of Romeo's character, Mr. Archer did not go a little further, and admit that, after all, Mr. Irving did *look* Romeo far better than the generality of his critics would allow. For Mr. Archer, if he has been in Italy, must know that the Italian young man is not, as a rule, the bright-complexioned, curly-haired, round-cheeked Adonis that most persons picture Romeo to have been. Mr. Irving looked, when made up, the image of one of those young men one sees so often in Italy, with piercing eyes, olive complexions,

lean cheeks, and no superfluity of flesh on their limbs.
The Friar, be it remembered, says to Romeo—

“Jesu Maria! what a deal of brine
Hath wash’d *thy* *sallow cheeks* for Rosaline!”

Act II. Sc. 3.

which clearly proves Romeo did not possess that beautiful pink and white complexion with which the imagination of some people loves to endow him. Mr. Archer’s suggestion that Mr. Irving “should by rights ‘have cast himself for the apothecary’” (p. 49) is one of his little jokes; he knows, as well as any one, that Mr. Irving could not take any part but Romeo, without such a serious loss as would prevent the play having any run. His motive in producing “Romeo and Juliet” was not that the character was any special favourite of his, but to give Miss Ellen Terry the opportunity of playing Juliet; a performance which, whatever Mr. Archer’s opinion of it may be, gave to hundreds and thousands of people the greatest delight.

VI.

BUT, enough of Mr. Archer’s criticisms of Mr. Irving’s acting, from the physical point of view; let us

now see what he has to say on the subject from a mental or moral point of view.

First, let me remark, that Mr. Archer describes his little vellum-bound parallelogram—I cannot call it a book—as “A Critical Study.” Now, I should have expected in a “Critical Study” of an actor to find some attempt to analyse his interpretation of one great part, at any rate; but there is not a vestige of such attempt in Mr. Archer’s work. There are a few detached sentences, here and there, which seem intended to show that Mr. Archer has observed his subject closely in one or two parts; but of critical analysis there is no complete specimen, not even a sample. This is to be regretted; because, had our arch-critic taken even one of Mr. Irving’s shorter rôles, and examined it in detail, we should have got some idea of what Mr. Archer’s conception of a character is; and perhaps some of his general remarks would have been more intelligible than they are at present. In fact, the very concise manner in which Mr. Archer has dismissed that part of his task which deals with the other than external qualities of Mr. Irving, as an actor, reminds me of the laconic but compendious answer of the historical student at Oxford; who, being asked in his examination paper “to give a brief sketch of the Emperor Titus,” gazed at the ceiling for inspi-

ration in vain, sucked his pen for an hour or so, and then wrote down, very slowly, in a large round text-hand, "HIS OTHER NAME WAS OATES."

Let us see for instance, what Mr. Archer has to say about Hamlet, which is generally considered Mr. Irving's greatest Shakesperian impersonation. "In Hamlet, if we agree to add ten years or so to the age probably intended by Shakespeare, the careworn melancholy of Mr. Irving's countenance is perfectly suited to the character" (p. 49).

"Mr. E. R. Russell has very truly remarked that the moment he walks down the stage on his first entrance in Hamlet, it needs no special stage arrangement, no 'reception,' no reference to the play-bill, to assure even the least initiated spectator that he is the most remarkable man on the stage. Had Tom Jones taken Partridge to the Lyceum, he would never have thought of undervaluing Hamlet to the King" (p. 71). "His Hamlet is better than his Macbeth or Othello" (p. 91).

"I was sorry to note a tendency to emphasize the hysterical phase of Hamlet's character, always prominent enough in Mr. Irving's conception" (p. 69, footnote).

These extracts contain all Mr. Archer's criticisms on Mr. Irving's interpretation of this most complex

character, the one in which, in face of much prejudice, he first forced the public to acknowledge him as a great Shakespearian actor. Of the effect that Mr. Irving's Hamlet has produced on persons of all classes in all parts of the country, time and space will not allow me now to speak. Certainly a little more studied criticism of this character would not have been out of place in "A Critical Study of Mr. Irving."

Mr. Archer does give one long extract from Mr. F. Russell's pamphlet, "Irving as Hamlet," chiefly for the purpose of introducing the singularly brilliant idea "that it is highly probable that Hamlet stammered" (pp. 72 and 73). Indeed Mr. Archer professes himself ready to write an essay on this subject; which may Heaven forbid! It is one of those limp, dyspeptic jokes, which illumine Mr. Archer's pages, like a ray of sunshine that having crawled through a thicket of fog, on a winter's day in London, falls on a dingy heap of snow, where it feels so ashamed of itself it does not seem to have any light or heat left in it.

But I think Mr. Archer misunderstands Mr. Russell's meaning; not wilfully of course, but from a want of paying proper attention to what he really does say. Let me give the extract and some of Mr. Archer's comments thereon. "In moments of high excitement," says Mr. Russell, "Irving rapidly plods

“ across the stage with a gait peculiar to him, a walk
“ somewhat resembling that of a fretful man trying to
“ get very quickly over a ploughed field. In certain
“ passages his voice has a querulous piping impatience
“ which cannot be reconciled with stage elegance.
“ But there is no reason why Hamlet should not have
“ had these peculiarities; and if we are to see him
“ really living in the midst of what has come upon him,
“ the genius of the actor who accomplishes this all-
“ important feat as only genius can, will be distinctly
“ helped, by any little ineffaceable peculiarities which,
“ while not inconsistent with the character, give the
“ representation a stamp of personal individuality.
“ This, though a minor characteristic, has greatly dis-
“ tinguished Mr. Irving’s acting in all his noted parts,
“ although the merit has not been much recognized
“ in the surface criticism of the day . . . Even in his
“ ‘Hamlet’ there is a strongly-marked and courage-
“ ously-preserved individuality which is more helpful
“ to the due effect of the play, than any amount of
“ insipid personal beauty and grace” (p. 72). On
this Mr. Archer remarks, “After this, shall I be
“ excused of exaggerating the danger that Mr. Irving’s
“ defects may be mistaken for qualities, to the lasting
“ detriment of sound acting in England? How, I
“ would ask, can the ‘ineffaceable peculiarities’ of an

“actor be said to give individuality to one character, “when they are necessarily the same in all the other “characters he plays” (p. 73).

What Mr. Russell means, I imagine, is that, when an actor succeeds in effacing his own intellectual and moral individuality so completely, as to become in mind, and heart, the character he is representing, the retention of any peculiarities of manner, inseparable from his own nature in the expression of strong emotions, gives to the character a “stamp of personal “individuality;” that is, makes him more like a living human being than he would be, did the actor suppress these peculiarities, at the expense of being natural, in “moments of high excitement.” Were the actor hampered by the necessity of suppressing these physical peculiarities, the moral part of the character would suffer; the mind would be occupied in watching for the impulse to make this habitual gesture, in order to restrain that impulse; and so inevitably, the self consciousness of the actor would be prominent, just at the very time when he should be most absorbed in the character he is representing.

But Mr. Archer does not fairly interpret the meaning of the words he quotes; he says, “There is indeed ‘no “‘reason why Hamlet should not have had these pecu- “‘liarities,’ except that Ophelia calls him the ‘glass of

“ ‘fashion and the mould of form,’ which even she could scarcely have said, had he *habitually moved* ‘as if ‘ ‘plodding rapidly over a ploughed field’ ” (p. 74). Now, Mr. Russell’s words are, “*In moments of high excitement* Irving rapidly plods across the stage, &c.” The words I have italicised make all the difference. There is not a man capable of strong emotions, who has not some physical peculiarity when expressing such emotions: even the most graceful pupil of the best Conservatoire would, if he really felt strongly, be sure to betray some physical peculiarities “in moments of high excitement”; and if he did not do so, his acting would surely be tame and unreal. Has not Mr. Archer seen cases in which an actor, though perfectly “made up” for his part, and using the right tone of voice and appropriate gesture, yet fails to impress his audience, in the slightest degree, with the belief that he is the character he is impersonating; or, in fact, to make them, for one moment, forget that he is anyone but himself? The reason of his failure is because he has not entered into the inner life of the character he is acting. Mr. Russell and those who, like myself, agree with him in recognising in Henry Irving the power of making the character he is acting “really live in the “midst of what ever has come upon him,” that is to say, in the midst of the doubts, the emotions, the calami-

ties with which the poet has filled and surrounded his creation ; the petty physical peculiarities, which he cannot entirely conceal, do not in the least interfere with the completeness of the impersonation ; we forget the corporal individuality of the actor, in the spiritual individuality of the character with which for the time being he has identified himself.

In his dealing with the mental qualities of Mr. Irving's acting, Mr. Archer begins by declaring that "Mr. Irving is singularly deficient in purely "mimetic power" (p. 77). This may be partly true ; but it cannot be denied he is the occasion of it in others ; for no actor has ever been, and is now, so often imitated as Mr. Irving : a shudder comes over one's whole frame, as one remembers the ghastly performance of would-be mimics, who start up like terrible spectres at evening parties, often uninvited, and favour us with "an imitation of Mr. Henry Irving." Certainly Mr. Irving is deficient in the lower mimetic power. He could not convulse a negro boy with the imitation of a turkey-cock ; but in mimicry, that is in imitating the external characteristics of certain phases of human nature, he is unrivalled. When was the prostration, that precedes the absolute parting of soul and body, so wonderfully "imitated," as by Mr. Irving in *Louis XI.* ? Did John Parry, wonderful mimic that

he was, ever succeed in bringing before your eyes an unseen material object more vividly than Mr. Irving does in the last Act of "The Bells ;" when he staggers across the stage, with the body of the murdered Jew on his back—in imagination only—but one seems to see the body really there. Such bits of acting as these require the possession of the mimetic talent in its very highest sense.

Next, Mr. Archer denies to Mr. Irving *in toto* the quality of inspiration. "He never carries us away on the wings of his passion or his pathos, to set us down again after a little, wondering through what regions of terror or of beauty we have in the meantime been wafted. He never brings us face to face with the very soul of pure humanity in some scene, or it may be some mere accent or gesture, which passes instantly into the very fibre of our being like a vivid, unforgettable, almost epoch-making personal experience" (p. 81). This is very pretty writing; but it means that Mr. Irving cannot lift Mr. Archer out of himself, as some actors and actresses have been fortunate enough to do. These moments, when the actor thrills the inmost soul of the spectator, are, as Mr. Archer observes, "partly subjective, dependent, that is, upon some chance predisposition in the individual to receive the thrilling impression" (p. 82). If this be so, and

Mr. Archer tells us it is, what wonder if Mr. Irving could not thrill Mr. Archer? He would have had a long way to lift him, before he got him out of himself: It may be Mr. Archer has not reflected that his mind might have been unconsciously employed in trying to reconcile the opinions, expressed in "The Fashionable Tragedian," with the conviction gradually forcing itself upon him, that the subject of that piece of scurrilous abuse was, after all, a great actor. There is not room, even in so capacious a mind as Mr. Archer's, for more than a certain number of thoughts at once. Let him persevere: go on fighting against prejudice and spite, my dear arch-critic, as perseveringly as you have done these last four years; and you will find that your capability of being thrilled will become wonderfully developed.

The instances that Mr. Archer brings forward to illustrate this alleged deficiency in Mr. Irving, are not very happy ones. The first is the scene which closes the second Act of "The Lyons Mail;" the scene in which the father, "after urging his son to suicide; attributes his refusal to physical cowardice, is one " of those passages in which the audience might be " made to 'rise at' a great actor in a storm and whirl- " wind of emotion" (p. 84). It seems to me that this scene affords an instance of that very same thrilling

effect which Mr. Archer mentions, when the father first gives the son the lie direct, and calls him "Coward!" Mr. Irving's acting there is superb. The old man has not struck him; but as Lesurque's cheek quivers and blanches, it seems as if he had added that last indignity. No words could express half so vividly the terrible effort it requires for the younger man, conscious of his own innocence, to restrain himself under such a gross and undeserved insult. I myself have seen that scene many times, and it has never failed in its effect. The other instance Mr. Archer chooses, is the Last Act of "Charles 1st." The passage I am about to quote ought perhaps to have been included in the excerpts of autobiography, relating to Mr. Archer's *quasi*-martyrdom. "I am myself peculiarly sensitive to such heroism as Charles shows in his last moments. From his entrance onwards, I have a lump in my throat; but it grows no larger as the scene progresses. There is no gradation, no climax" (p. 87). I confess that I cannot read this passage without being deeply moved; in fact, I feel a very large lump in my own throat. To think of poor Mr. Archer sitting with that obstinate lump in his throat, getting no larger indeed, but, on the other hand, getting no smaller. What a picture of moral asphyxia! One longs to suggest some form of cough-

lozenge, if one only knew which kind is best for such a complaint.

But Mr. Archer must not be cast down ; it may have been the fault of his throat that the lump grew no larger ; perhaps his throat would not hold one of bigger size. Nature does not lavish all her gifts on the same happy individual ; some people have large throats, and small intellects ; while some people, like Mr. Archer, have large intellects, and small throats.

Mr. Archer's criticism of the character of Charles Ist, though somewhat scrappy, is very characteristic. Just before narrating 'the lump in the throat' catastrophe, this is what he says : " Such a scene as " the last act of ' Charles I.' may be said to ' play " ' itself.' Mr. Irving speaks the lines very intelli- " gently and very monotonously. He looks the part " to perfection, and there is pathos in that very look, " with the associations it calls up. Our sympathy with " this sad and brave gentleman has been awakened " long ago. It is maintained and perhaps heightened " in this scene, but if heightened it is by the situation " and not by the actor. The distinction may seem a " fine one, but will be understood at once by any one " who will note at what a dead level our emotion " remains throughout the scene " (p. 87).

'Pon my word I cannot understand this criticism.

Who "awakened our sympathy with this sad and brave "gentleman," if not the actor? Why does the scene play itself? I deny "our emotion remains at the same "dead level throughout the scene:" Mr. Archer's may, but mine does not. It is not a scene for violent effects, but for calm deep pathos: and that gradually increases from the moment of the doomed king's entry, through his parting with his children, to the moment when he goes out, with that sad look turned back on his woe-struck wife. It is strange that Mr. Archer should, in speaking of Charles 1st, have not a word to say about the delivery of that beautiful speech addressed to the traitor Moray. I never shall forget the effect produced by that speech the first night of the play.

But in order to understand why Mr. Archer finds some difficulty in judging dispassionately of "Charles 1st," let us refer back to some previous remarks on the subject of this character. "Mr. Irving's portrait of the "traditional gentleman-king is noble and beautiful. "If it were only as true to history as it is to Vandyke, "it would be perfect. Its falsity is not Mr. Irving's "fault but Mr. Wills', and lies not so much in any "positive glory shed on Charles as in the blackening "of Cromwell so as to make his antagonist stand out "in bright relief. Had it not been for this gratuitous "besmirching of the actual hero, we could have

“accepted with unmixed satisfaction Mr. Irving’s “picture of the legendary hero of popular imagination” (p. 50). Is it possible so upright a judge, so conscientious a critic, as Mr. Archer, could allow his political prejudices to colour, or to affect, in the slightest degree, his judgment on a matter of Art? Mr. Irving has to play Charles 1st as Mr. Wills represented him; he must be judged by that standard alone; with history neither he nor his critic has anything to do. Yet Mr. Archer almost says in so many plain words, that he cannot admire Mr. Irving’s Charles 1st so much as his artistic feelings would prompt him to do, because his political feelings are hurt by the blackening of Cromwell!

The fact is, that these “thrilling moments,” of which Mr. Archer speaks, are more often experienced in the representation of the old-fashioned classic tragedy than in that of Shakespeare. In scenes where a long stretch of speeches, descriptive or declamatory in their character, is followed by an oasis of emotional dialogue or a sudden brief exclamation of intensely dramatic power, the actor has the opportunity of making a great ‘point’; the contrast is so striking between the long dead calm and the sudden outburst of feeling. To make ‘points’ was the object of the old school of English actors, and is still the object of nearly all foreign tragedians,

at least that I have seen. In order to get his effect the actor underplays the greater part of the scene, and so works up to his climax. Now this method is unsuited to Shakespeare's tragedies, which are full of scenes in which anti-climax after anti-climax occurs. As Mr. E. Russell pointed out in his admirable article in the *Fortnightly Review* [No. CCII. (N.S.)], Shakespeare's plays are essentially non-classic. There is no attempt at any regularity of form ; the end of the scene is often the quietest portion of it ; the storm of passion swells and dies away, and then bursts forth again ; the melody now grows loud, now faint, and often ends abruptly with no gradual *crescendo* movement.

In the classic tragedy the passions are grandly but rudely delineated ; in Shakespeare they are anatomised ; rapid transitions of feeling occur ; the characters are not sketched in broad rounded outlines, but etched with a free bold hand, yet, at the same time, with numberless minute touches. It is one of the principal merits of Mr. Irving's method that, to use Mr. Archer's own words, he pays "minute attention to detail" (p. 90). Shakespeare emphatically requires this quality in those who attempt to interpret him on the stage ; you cannot slur over anything that his characters say or do. Mr. Irving knows this ; and for this very reason his audiences reserve their applause as a rule

till the scene is finished; they are afraid of losing something if they interrupt the performance with plaudits: their attention has no halting places but the entr'actes; their intellects as well as their feelings are concerned; they are taught to think even while they are being moved to laughter or to tears.

It is very remarkable that, in speaking of Mr. Irving's higher qualities as an actor, Mr. Archer should have omitted all reference to the admirable manner in which he delivers soliloquies, especially those in Shakespeare's plays. It is scarcely too much to say that the soliloquies of Hamlet, of Iago, and of Benedick, had never been fully understood by an audience, at least in our time, till Mr. Irving played those parts. Every one can remember the old fashion of delivering soliloquies—a fashion which still obtains with foreign actors of Shakespeare, even the best—I mean that fashion of coming down the stage, and speaking the soliloquy to the audience, just as if the character represented were "speaking a piece," as the Americans say. The well-known soliloquy of Hamlet, "To be, or not to be, &c.," delivered in the old way, always gave me the impression that Hamlet had composed it in the interval between the Acts, and was trying it on us to see if it was effective; in fact, that it was "a piece" he had written for recitation, and that he took

the opportunity while having the stage all to himself, to rehearse it before the audience. It is one of the greatest merits of Mr. Irving's acting that, in speaking soliloquies, he seems to be "thinking aloud;" the words come as the thoughts arise in his mind; they do not seem to have been previously studied. This is, surely, the very perfection of art; no longer are these great masterpieces of mental analysis reduced to the level of set declamations; they are that revelation of the mind's and heart's inner workings which Shakespeare intended them to be. I should have thought that no one would have attempted a critical study of Henry Irving, as an actor, without referring, in some terms or other, to this most distinguishing feature of the intellectual side of his acting.

But, in spite of this omission, Mr. Archer fully acknowledges, in terms that may be called almost extravagant, the force of Mr. Irving's intellect; indeed, it is somewhat puzzling that, after writing such a sentence as this, "By intellect he makes us forget his negative failings and forgive his positive faults," Mr. Archer can any longer scruple to admit that Mr. Irving is a great actor. For who, but a great actor, could produce such an effect by mental force? What is this "intellect" that makes the man who has stated deliberately that Mr. Irving can neither walk,

nor talk, nor stand still, forget all these defects, but that power of becoming in mind, heart, and soul some other human being, which is the very essence of great acting? It is quite clear that we Irvingites must make room in the front rank of our forces for Mr. William Archer. Saul cannot be long outside the circle of the select: very soon must he be numbered among the prophets.

VII.

ON Mr. Irving, as a manager, Mr. Archer has little save praise to bestow. Even while he attempts to sneer at Art, as we understand the word now-a-days, and at the dilettanteism which "has permeated society," he trips himself up, and is found on his knees, oftener than he himself would admit, before our patron saint. He has denied Mr. Irving the possession of inspiration, yet he writes further on: "Mr. Irving has the art of "inspiring to the verge of genius his scenic artists and "machinists, which may possibly be the reason why "he has so little inspiration left over for himself" (p. 96). This sentence is worth studying; because many critics have told us that Mr. Archer's "Critical Study" is written in faultless English. What does our great bowman mean by this shaft of ridicule? Mr. Irving has no inspiration; but he can inspire others,

scene-painters and mechanists; therefore, he can give away that of which himself he has none. "But this," Mr. Archer might say, "is a different sort of inspiration from that of which I spoke before (see p. 81). True, I said there that Mr. Irving was 'of all distinguished actors the least inspired;' but that does not prevent his inspiring scene-painters and mechanists." How can it be a different sort of inspiration from that which he himself requires, my good arch-critic, when you tell us in the very next sentence that the fact of his having endowed others with inspiration is "possibly the reason why he has so little left over for himself"? This comes of a rash desire to be epigrammatic at the expense of common sense, my good Balaam; make up your mind whether you are going to bless or to curse; and having done so, bless or curse with no hesitating lips. If you wish to damn, don't, I pray you, stop short at the D, and leave the rest of that crisp little word in a forlorn state of aposiopesis.

Now, Mr. Archer, I have a bone to pick with you which will be indeed a bone of contention. What do you mean by dragging in a paragraph about Miss Ellen Terry—who is not the subject of your critical study—apologising for the digression, and yet finding time and space to deny her any merit as a tragedienne?

You call it "Mr. Irving's master-stroke as a manager"—the creation of Miss Ellen Terry. Faith, I agree with you. If Mr. Irving can create any more Ellen Terrys, the sooner he exercises his creative power the better. "To those who, in tragic parts, demand more " than graceful attitudes and a *sing-song recitation*, it " must seem a pity that this most charming of all our " actresses of comedy should have been translated into a " sphere in which she is so far from at home " (p. 100). The italics are mine. Where are your ears, my gentle Balaam, if you can hear nothing but "sing-song recitation" in the tones of that ravishing voice? Confess it was a slip of the pen—you meant to have written siren-song. No one is more alive than I am to Miss Ellen Terry's faults as an actress; she is unequal, I know: it is the penalty of such an impressionable nature, and of such highly-strung nerves as hers, to be unequal: but if ever there was a voice which seemed to breathe the very soul of music, a voice which seemed instinct with the songs of angels, full of sweetness and tenderness, it is hers. Did you ever see her in Olivia? You call her the "most charming " of all our actresses of comedy;" you praise her for her "Ruth in 'Eugene Aram,'" a part utterly destitute of any comedy whatsoever, while you dismiss with an affected sentence of Italian—that means being inter-

puted, "it is not worth talking about,"—her Portia and her Beatrice, two of the most perfect characters that Comedy can claim as her own. That scene with Nerissa—where were your eyes and your ears, where was your intellect if that scene did not appeal to you as the perfection of graceful comedy? Do you find fault with her because she gives the speech about mercy, in the trial scene, as if it welled up from her heart on the spur of the moment; and not as if she had been "coached" in it by Bellario, and had practised it before a glass? But I too should be led "far from "my subject" were I to take too much pains to refute your acid scraps of argument on this point. Go, for Heaven's sake! and get a box of anti-bilious pills or an electropathic belt, or some sovereign remedy for dyspepsia, or ever you dare again attempt to criticize Ellen Terry.

In the praise that Mr. Archer bestows on Mr. Irving as a manager, there is the same niggardly spirit with which I have had to find fault so many times before. He constantly tries to take away with one hand what he has given with the other. He cannot deny that the details which Mr. Irving elaborates are appropriate; but he must have his subacid sneer. He says, "Burbage and Betterton, relying upon pure convention for their surroundings, bore the whole weight

“ of the drama upon their own shoulders. To Garrick
“ fell the still more difficult task of struggling with
“ half—or quarter—realism. Mr. Irving, with all the
“ resources of absolute scenic illusion at his disposal,
“ wisely shifts upon his accessories more than half the
“ burden ” (p. 99).

Surely there is some praise, less adulterated, due to the manager, who, while filling up every detail in the surroundings of the characters, suggested by the author of the play, yet does so with such care and such taste that the beauty of the picture is never swallowed up by the splendour of the frame in which it is set; the poetry is never stifled by the elaborateness of the illustrations : who never is tempted to introduce pageants, almost if not quite irrelevant to the dramatist's idea—as Charles Kemble did when he turned the “*Two Gentlemen of Verona*” into an elaborate spectacle, or as those older and more heinous offenders, Davenant and Dryden, who deformed the “*Tempest*” into “*The Enchanted Island*” :—surely the actor-manager who, in whatever scenic or decorative effects he introduces, shows the same reverence for the true spirit of Shakespeare's plays that he does for the true text in all his acting versions, never admitting a line that was not of the poet's own writing ; surely he deserves no grudging recognition, much less cold sneers, from those who

profess to value what is highest and purest in dramatic art. It is to the exquisite taste and perfect harmony which pervade every detail of the elaborate stage-pictures that Mr. Irving presents, that he owes, undoubtedly, a great part of his success; but this taste and this harmony cannot be obtained except under the direction of one who has thoroughly and lovingly entered into the very spirit of the poet whose works he is illustrating.

VIII.

HAVING now gone through Mr. Archer's critical study pretty well from beginning to end, I come to that congenial task which I have reserved until the end as a *bonne bouche*,—much as a boy reserves a spoonful of jam given him with his rice,—namely, the examination of Mr. Archer's *apologia pro erroribus suis*,—his recantation, such as it is, of "The Fashionable Tragedian."

"Shall I—dare I? confess that there was a time
 "when I was reckoned among the unbelievers; nay,
 "when I was a very Saul of Tarsus, so far as bigotry
 "went, in my opposition to the new creed? I clung
 "to the Pharasaic prejudice, with which even such a
 "liberal agnostic as Hamlet seems to have been
 "infected, that ability to walk and talk was an indis-

"pensable condition of tolerable acting. I even tried
"my hand at stone-throwing in a small way, though I
"am happy to say my little lapidatory exercises broke
"no bones, far less contributed to a martyrdom" (p. 39).

What a graceful apology! How modest of Mr. Archer to compare himself only to Saul of Tarsus, and not to claim any right to be identified with the saint into which that eminent persecutor developed! He is quite right, for, in spite of this recantation of some of his worst errors, I fear he has got little further than the stage of 'kicking against the pricks' of his own conscience. But having identified himself with one scriptural character, why did Mr. Archer stop there? The picture of the youthful critic hurling his stones at the great actor might, surely, have recalled to him David and Goliath. Perhaps he shrank from comparing Mr. Irving, by implication, with Goliath: or he may have thought that he was making too great a demand on the credulity of his readers, if he asked them to believe that so accurate a marksman, as he has shown himself to be, could possibly practise his "lapidatory exercises" without due effect. But it may be that the Goliath, on this occasion, possessed a tougher skin than his Philistine original; or that Mr. Archer's "lapidatory" missiles were of a softer nature than those employed by the future King of Israel.

There yet remains one scriptural character which Mr. Archer might have assumed without any difficulty ; I mean that of Shimei, who is described as cursing and throwing stones at David when he was no longer a shepherd boy, but a King. I suppose the stones he threw must have miscarried ; for we read that he was afterwards reduced to casting dust. Surely this sufficiently describes the attitude of the great critic, Mr. Archer, towards Mr. Irving in 1877. Now, however, we are in 1883, and the success which Shimei thought would vanish before his curses, has grown stronger and more certain with time. King David is returning in triumph, when Shimei throws himself on his knees before him in abject penitence. He begs him not to remember his former perverseness ; and does all that profuse apologies can do to atone for his former insults. It strikes me that, allowing for the fact that Mr. Archer's apology is not so complete as Shimei's, there is a very strong resemblance between them. I only hope that the unhappy fate, which overtook the son of Gera, may never fall on Mr. Archer.

Let us see what Mr. Archer did say in his former "criticism"—for so "The Fashionable Tragedian" is described on the title-page thereof. I select a few of the least offensive passages from that tasteful little work,

“Mr. Irving is, in fact, one of the worst actors that
 “ever trod the British stage in so-called ‘leading
 “characters’ ” (p. 5).

“His figure, again, utterly precludes the possibility
 “of dignity, grace, or even ease” (p. 10).

“In the scene with Polonius, for instance, this most
 “gentlemanly and refined actor behaved with such
 “marked rudeness and deliberately sane impertinence
 “(and that to so dignified a Polonius as Mr. Chippen-
 “dale), that he suggested nothing so strongly as a
 “rude overgrown schoolboy insulting his guardian”
 (p. 16).

“In the great scene with Ophelia, * * * * *
 “* * * he reversed the above comparison, and
 “reminded one of the tyrannical guardian in a farce
 “ordering off the innocent heroine to a boarding-
 “school” (pp. 16, 17).

“To compare the noble dignity of the great Italian
 “(Salvini) with the physical and intellectual feeble-
 “ness of Mr. Irving is to compare the sublime and the
 “ridiculous” (p. 18).

“So much then for his psychological subtlety. If it
 “be this which makes of Hamlet a weak-minded
 “puppy, of Macbeth a Uriah Heep in chain armour,
 “of Othello an ‘infuriated Sepoy,’ and of Richard III.
 “a cheap Mephistopheles, all we can say is, the less

“we have of psychological subtlety on the English stage the better” (pp. 19, 20).

“To say that he elaborates his performances is merely to say that he does not insult the public by appearing in half-studied parts” (pp. 19, 20).

“In the hands of Mr. Irving it (realism) became merely ludicrous.”

“Our contention is, that Mr. Irving can neither walk nor talk like a normal human being, and thus could not be so much as a tolerable actor, even if he had all these lesser talents and a hundred more to boot” (p. 22).

Lastly, a most unfortunate prophecy; “with his artistic failure fails the last hope, for some time at least, of the establishment of a permanent school of Shakespearean acting in England” (p. 23).

To one who has read Mr. Archer’s critical study of 1883, these excerpts from this criticism of 1877 must appear ridiculously irreconcilable with the later opinion of the critic. As a sincere Irvingite, I am the last to find fault with Mr. Archer’s progress from darkness into light. I can only wish that he had performed the journey with a more cheerful and frank spirit.

I will now give one or two pages from his former and later criticisms respectively, in order that my readers may compare them at their leisure.

In "The Fashionable Tragedian" Mr. Irving's physical appearance is thus described :—

"A weak, loosely-built figure, and a face whose
"range of expression is very limited, are the two
"principal disadvantages under which he has had to
"labour. Abject terror, sarcasm, and frenzy, are the
"only passions which Mr. Irving's features can adequately express. When he drops his lower jaw and
"turns up the whites of his eyes, he certainly looks
"as if some direful ghost had been freezing his
"young blood by telling the secrets of its prison-house ; and when he raises his chin, curls his under
"lip, and elevates his eyebrows, the sneer so produced
"is inexpressibly diabolic. The other phases of feeling and emotion are utterly unknown to his face"
(pp. 9, 10).

"His figure, again, utterly precludes the possibility
"of dignity, grace, or even ease" (p. 10).

In the Vellum Pamphlet Mr. Archer thus describes the same individual :—

"There have been many better stage-faces than
"Mr. Irving's, but few more remarkable. The high
"narrow forehead, the marked and overhanging but
"flexile eye-brows, the dark eyes which can be by
"turns so penetrating, so dreamy, so sinister, and so
"melancholy, the thin straight nose, the almost lipless

“ sensitive mouth, the hollow cheeks and marvellously
“ mobile jaw, combine to form an incomparable
“ vehicle for the expression of a certain range of
“ character and emotion. To me, I confess, the face
“ under certain aspects seems absolutely beautiful,
“ but its beauty is ascetic, not sensuous—a beauty not of
“ line and curve, but of flash and furrow’ (pp. 47, 48).

So much for the happy change that has come over Mr. Archer’s mind with regard to Mr. Irving’s physical appearance.

With regard to his mental qualities let me compare two more passages. This is what Mr. Archer says in “The Fashionable Tragedian.” “His much lauded
“ intellectuality is not worth quarrelling about * * * *
“ But we can safely grant him ‘eminence’ in intellectual respects. That admission does not affect our
“ argument, which is merely to prove that he is a very
“ bad actor” (pp. 11, 12).

Here is what he says in his last “critical study”:—
“ His Iago, who speaks direct from brain to brain,
“ comes as near perfection as anything he has done. By
“ intellect Mr. Irving enters ‘into the skin’ of Charles I.
“ and Richelieu. By intellect he makes Dubosc a
“ living type, Mathias a haunting recollection. By
“ intellect he produces the effect of masterful decision
“ of purpose, which saves even his worst parts from

“ the fatal reproach of feebleness. By intellect he
“ makes us forget his negative failings and forgive his
“ positive faults. By intellect he forces us to respect
“ where we cannot admire him. By intellect he
“ dominates the stage ” (pp. 91, 92).

If any one can reconcile these two criticisms they must be possessed of an intellect more subtle than that of Mr. Archer, to say nothing of Mr. Irving.

But Mr. Archer may say: “ What is the good of
“ dragging up thus the follies of my youth from the
“ pit of oblivion when I have confessed that familiarity
“ with Mr. Irving’s acting has forced me into a reluctant respect for his talent ? ”

The reason, my dear arch-critic, is that you may ponder upon the folly—to use a mild expression—of giving vent to spiteful criticisms of any artist who is conscientiously trying his very best to do honour to his art. It is all very well for you to say, as you did in “ The Fashionable Tragedian,” that you did not know Mr. Irving personally, and that you were actuated by no professional jealousy in the virulent attack which you then made on him. But this disclaimer is an old trick, which, to those who know human nature, is only so much wasted protestation. Envy, malice, and uncharitableness did not perish with the Early Church ; they were not buried in the tombs of the Crusaders ;

nor were they abolished by the Reformation ; nor are they likely to be by any measure for the improvement of the human race, however wise, and however elaborate. We may hear every day in Society, whether at the club, or in the drawing-room, the most cruel slanders uttered with the greatest flippancy against the characters of men and women ; but in nine cases out of ten, the persons, who forge or circulate these slanders, are utter strangers to the victims of their detraction, and are actuated by no motive of professional jealousy. The fact is that the vanity and self-love of human nature rebel against the praise lavished on another, whether it be for personal charms or intellectual accomplishments ; and there is, I know not why, an especial feeling of resentment, in many persons, against any praise bestowed upon an actor, other than the applause of his audience for the time being. It may be a remnant of the old prejudice which looked upon actors as rogues and vagabonds ; but it is an undeniable fact—a fact equally true with regard to Roscius, to Betterton, to Garrick, to Kemble, to Kean—that it is quite sufficient that any portion of Society should recognise an actor as something better than a trained monkey, bound to amuse them when so disposed, in order to rouse the jealousy and hatred of nearly all the rest of Society. There is, perhaps, no malice so bitter, as the sentimental malice of your

dilettante critic, of the man who has learned to look upon himself as a judge of what is correct and excellent in any art ; who resents, almost fiercely, the success of any artist upon whom he has not, at the commencement of his career, bestowed the stamp of his approval.

But I am getting into a vein a little too serious, and I am launching forth upon a theme which invites almost unlimited comment. Let me say my adieu to you, Mr. Archer, as gracefully and pleasantly as possible. You have shown a capacity for self-education which is most encouraging to those who wish you well ; and, believe me, I am among that number. *Macte novâ virtute puer !* Go on, fighting against your prejudices ! From being impudent and scurrilous you have learned to become polite and sarcastic. Go a step further ; become just and generous : when you find that facts are against you, when you find that the merit, at which as a youth you sneered, has become recognised by the majority of persons of better judgment, taste, and intellect than yourself, throw off what remains to you of the rags of Thersites, and do not be ashamed of joining heartily in the applause to which your better judgment and feelings prompt you. I shall look forward, with great interest, to your next criticism on Mr. Irving. If he returns from America with fresh laurels, as doubtless he will, and if he

undertakes another tour through the provinces, I shall hope to hear you performing a flourish of trumpets in advance of him. I shall look to see upon the railway bookstalls another "Critical Study," which shall be as much in advance of your "Vellum Pamphlet" as that was an improvement upon "The Fashionable Tragedian." If you are a little weary of criticism, if to praise that which others have praised be repugnant to your nature, strike out a new line. You say:—

"Anyone who knows Mr. Irving's manner, the effects he seeks and those he avoids, may form a pretty fair preconception of what he is likely to make of a new Shakespearean part" ("Critical Study," pp. 90, 91).

Take your own hint; give us a criticism on Mr. Irving's *Lear* before he plays it; you will be in advance of all the other critics; you will be sure to have much to say that is worth hearing; and you will have a very excellent chance of following Iago's sage advice by putting money into your purse. Think over this suggestion: I make it to you in a friendly spirit, yet not from "wholly disinterested motives"; for, personally, I should like to see such a work from your pen. And so, for the present, I bid you adieu.

THE END.

